

WHY SUGAR IS MAKING YOU OLD

It's not only the usual high-sugar suspects, says **Dr Linda Friedland**, but the hidden sweet stuff in "healthy" foods which is ageing you.

YOU'RE SMART enough to know that living on chocolate and soft drinks does nothing for your health. That's why you always opt for the organic muesli bar over the chocolate cake and the fresh fruit juice rather than the lemonade.

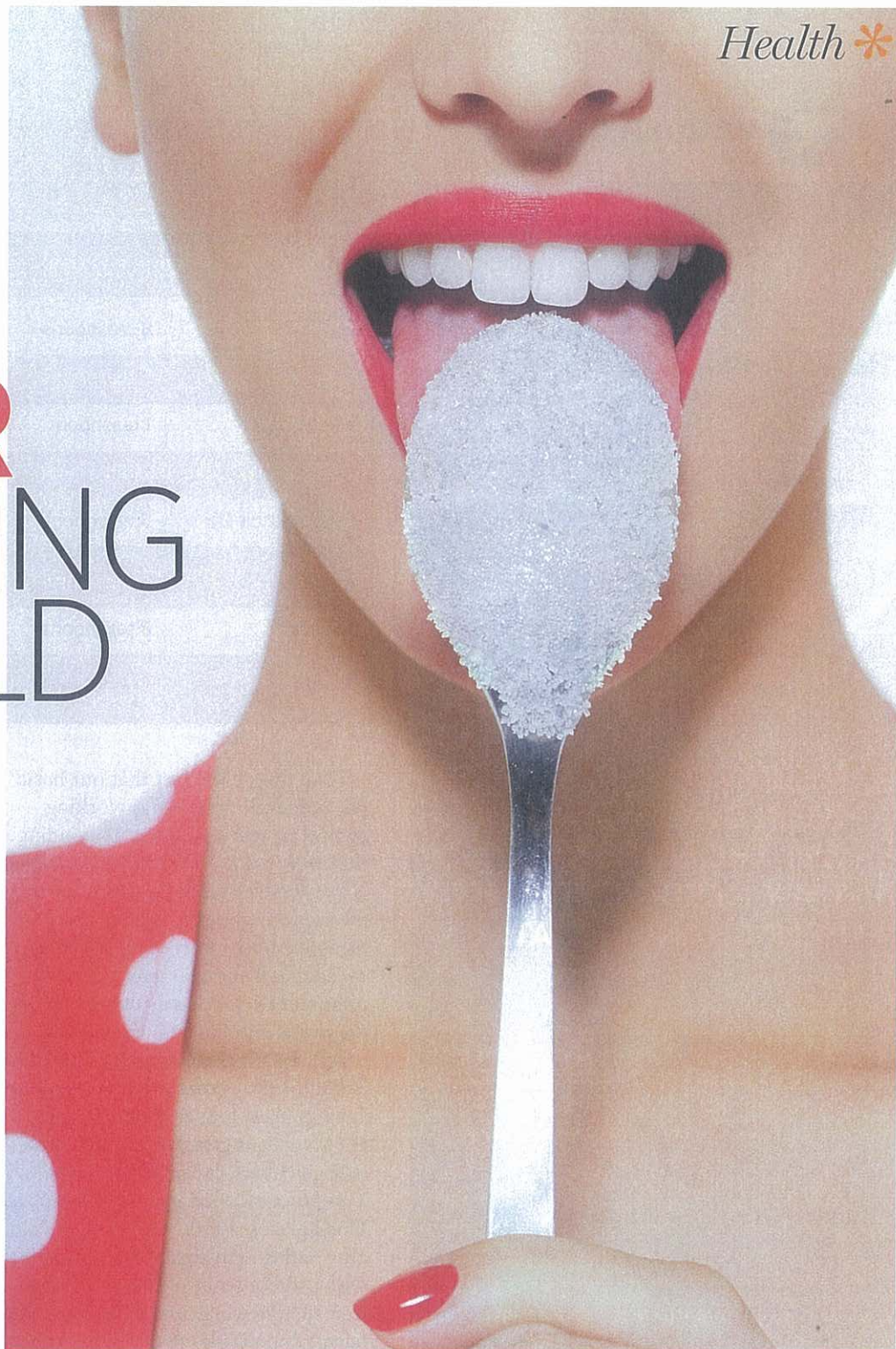
Yet new research shows that your seemingly "healthy" choices may be no better than the unhealthy ones. Why? Because despite the fact they look and maybe even taste nutritious, the majority of today's so-called healthy choices are frighteningly low on vitamins and minerals, while disturbingly high in sugar.

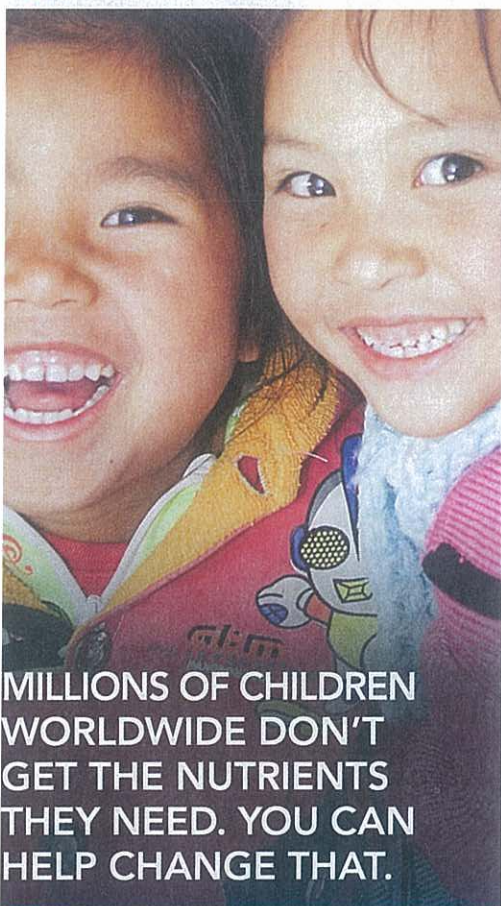
The result? You're taking in reams of empty calories, yet leaving your body starved of goodness. And you're giving your fresh-faced looks a premature hammering by damaging your skin. It's not just you who is falling into this trap – it's pretty much all of us. According to Sydney-based nutritionist and author Catherine Saxelby, the

average Australian woman knocks back an incredible 31 teaspoons of sugar each day – almost three times the level of added sugar recommended by the Australian Dietary Guidelines, which suggest 10 teaspoons (50g) is plenty. Clearly, our "healthy" choices aren't as nutritious as they may seem.

Yet it's not all our fault. You see, the food industry is working against us. How? Well, for one thing, sugar is being

added to almost all processed foods. And we're not just talking the obvious culprits, such as soft drinks and breakfast cereals. The white stuff is also being poured into seemingly savoury items, such as canned soups, yogurt and energy bars. Yes, the very foods we rely on as being "healthy" or "diet friendly" are often high in added sugar, thanks to food manufacturers wanting to improve taste, bulk, viscosity and texture. ➤





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COMMONLY EATEN FOODS	SUGAR CONTENT
Can of Coke (340ml)	10 teaspoons
Orange juice (340ml)	8 teaspoons
Milo and milk	5 teaspoons
Weet-bix (2)	1 teaspoon
Tim Tam (2)	7-8 teaspoons
Anzac biscuit (1)	5 teaspoons
Vegemite sandwich	1 teaspoon
Pavlova	8 teaspoons
Packet of chewy lollies (30g)	6 teaspoons

Then there's the fact that our basic physiological make-up is working against us when it comes to avoiding the sweet stuff. The truth is that sugar is a seductive and palatable food. It arouses our appetite, acting as an incentive for us to eat more. And as we said earlier, sugar ages the body prematurely, leaving us unhealthy on the inside and lined on the outside.

US celebrity dermatologist Dr Fredric Brandt believes that when it comes to ageing, sugar is enemy number one. He says sugar attacks skin cells and collagen fibres, causing elasticity loss. This process, called glycation, is simple. Blood glucose levels, which rise rapidly after eating high-sugar foods, combine with protein molecules in the blood to form a new harmful substance. The harmful molecules then bind to other proteins elsewhere in the body. Most vulnerable to this type of damage are the collagen and elastin protein fibres that keep skin strong and supple. He believes that by reducing your sugar intake, you can turn back the clock by a full 10 years.

Sydney-based celebrity beauty therapist Amy Erbacher agrees, saying evidence shows that sugar has a significant effect on our skin and our bodies. "Too much sugar damages collagen and collagen is

what keeps skin firm and elastic," says Amy. "Eat too much and your skin will become lifeless and dull."

Overdoing the sugar will also cause you to gain weight. Too much sugar in the blood will get stored as excess fat and much of it will be laid down in the lining of vessels, putting you at risk of heart disease and stroke. Research has also demonstrated a possible link between high sugar consumption and an increased risk of certain cancers, arthritis and even Alzheimer's disease.

So should we be avoiding sugar altogether? Well, not exactly. Sugar is an essential supply of sustained energy to your body, particularly your brain. The trouble occurs when you take in too much. Do that and you'll experience a rush of energy and feel satisfied. Unfortunately, that feeling doesn't last because sugar also causes a spike in your insulin levels, which pushes the glucose into your cells, thereby plummeting your blood glucose levels once again. And guess what happens then? Yep, this plunge leaves you fatigued, moody and craving for ... more sugar.

Indeed, you'll never be satisfied and, in all likelihood, will continually seek further sugar highs. That's not much fun, but as we've already pointed out, it's far more serious than that.

The bottom line? It's time to look at your sugar intake and, if necessary, cut back now. Your body and your lovely face will thank you for it. ■

LOWER YOUR SUGAR INTAKE IN FOUR STEPS

- 1 Drink water instead of soft drinks and fruit juice, which are the major contributors to excess added sugar.
- 2 Eat more whole foods, snack on high-fibre, low-GI carbs, nuts, low-sugar yogurt, wholemeal crackers and fresh fruit in moderate amounts.
- 3 Keep chocolate, lollies and cake treats for special occasions only.
- 4 Don't add sugar. Slowly reduce the amount of sugar you add to your coffee, tea and cereal. Or choose a substitute, such as a small amount of honey, or a healthier sweet alternative, such as stevia, agave syrup or Sucralose.